

## A BASIC DECEPTION IN EXHIBITIONS OF HYPNOSIS

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PUBLIC exhibitions of hypnosis on the stage and over the radio are an affront to science. Such a statement should be so obvious as to appear trite; but, in view of certain occurrences of recent years, there is need of saying it. And there is need of saying it in this JOURNAL in view of the recent publication in it of an article, "A Demonstration of Hypnotism" (4), which incorporates a form of deception found frequently in typical public exhibitions. Such exhibitions, "though they make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve."

### A COMMON FORM OF DECEPTION IN PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS OF HYPNOSIS

The deception indicated by the title of this article lies in the use of subjects who have been previously developed to the somnambulistic stage, and who can subsequently be rehypnotized deeply in an instant or in a few seconds, and in the failure to inform audiences of this fact of previous hypnosis. The simple truth is that no hypnotist has ever been able to hypnotize deeply any normal person for the first time without spending considerable time. Usually, with the most highly hypnotizable of subjects, the upper 20 or 25 per cent who are potentially somnambulistic (1, p. 60), at least an hour or two, and sometimes many hours and many sessions, are required to achieve somnambulism, marked by complete amnesia and the other phenomena of the deepest hypnosis. Occasionally, with those whose

centile rank in hypnotizability is close to 100, a few minutes will suffice for the first development of hypnotic somnambulism, but such cases are rare. Never in the history of hypnotism has any normal person been hypnotized to the somnambulistic stage for the first time in a matter of seconds, contrary to the impression which stage performers frequently try to convey.

It is no exception to this statement that pathological cases, those subject to spontaneous attacks of hysterical somnambulism in everyday life, might sometimes have sudden attacks of hysterical somnambulism coincidentally with the first attempts of hypnotists to induce somnambulism, or even as a result of the hypnotists' efforts. This is no contradiction of the proposition stated in the last paragraph above for the simple reason that these clinical cases are not normal persons. They are persons who have been predeveloped in nature's laboratory, *i.e.*, in connection with the stresses of everyday living. And, in spite of occasional exceptions, the rule is that hysterical persons are even less predisposed to experimentally induced dissociation in the psychological laboratory, *i.e.*, to hypnosis, than are normal persons. The small percentage of hysterical patients whom Janet was able to develop into somnambulistic hypnotic subjects, 120 hypnotic somnambules out of 3500 patients (6, pp. 296, 361), is sufficient evidence of this.

But, when a normal subject has once been developed to the stage of som-

nambulism, he can usually or always be rehypnotized just as deeply as ever in the past in just a few seconds. Erickson speaks of the necessity, even in later hypnosis, of a matter of time, even an hour or more, for the reinduction of a profound trance. The whole trend of experience of hypnotists throughout the history of scientific hypnotism, however, has been contrary to Erickson's experience. My own experience has been that never more than a few seconds have been required to rehypnotize previously developed somnambules to a stage deep enough to make possible the production of extreme phenomena, including criminal acts, which Erickson says he has never been able to produce (3, 12, 2). It is not the element of time that is important in rehypnotizing, but the original selection of highly hypnotizable subjects and then the use of time-saving methods in rehypnotizing.

Two results, both unfortunate for science, result from stage deception inherent in the failure of hypnotists to tell audiences the previous hypnotic histories of their subjects. First, many people, believing correctly that no one has the ability to influence another person so profoundly in so short a time, look upon the whole performance as a fake—as indeed it sometimes is. Sometimes the alleged hypnotic phenomena are only pretended and deliberately acted out by subjects who are confederates in a mere show. But sometimes the phenomena are genuine, and it is unfortunate that acceptance of this fact by the more skeptical of the general public is rendered difficult by the manner in which the phenomena are produced on the stage, as if for the first time in the subjects in question. The second result is even more unfortunate than the first. This second result is that many persons of a credulous nature “swallow hook, line, and sinker,” accept

the hypnotic phenomena as genuine (as they may or may not be in any given case), and believe that some telepathic mental influence on the part of the operator, a sort of casting of a spell, is being demonstrated.

As psychologists know, but as large portions of the general public do not know, there is no mental influence of a telepathic nature involved in hypnotizing. Hypnotizing is done by the presentation of stimuli to the sense organs of the subject. The rapid or instantaneous hypnotizing of predeveloped subjects, on the stage or in the radio studio, before audiences kept in the dark as to the fact of previous work done on the subjects, conceals the physical aspect of hypnotic methods and makes inevitable in the popular mind the association of hypnosis with magic, witchcraft, and telepathy.

The methods of inducing hypnosis for the first time are varied, but they all involve manipulation of the subject's attention, usually, at the start, by visual stimuli (Braid's method of fixed staring by the subject at any small object, preferably one held near the subject's eyes and slightly above the normal line of vision), and then, after the eyes are closed, either involuntarily or voluntarily at the request of the operator, by auditory stimuli, chiefly those of a verbal nature, though tactual stimuli also may be employed. When the subject's attention is sufficiently mobilized by such methods, after a time dissociation may occur, to the extent that the subject is predisposed to experimentally induced dissociation, so that there occur first the phenomena of slight hypnosis, motor phenomena, the inability to open the eyes or to move the hands, and, later on, phenomena in the sensory and memory fields such as anesthesias, hallucinations, and amnesia.

Posthypnotic phenomena consist of

actions to be performed, or motor helplessness, or sensory or memory abnormalities, or the onset of a new hypnotic trance, occurring after hypnosis as a result of what has been done and said to the subject in the hypnotic state. Until complete amnesia for the hypnotic state can be induced, and this is the basic test of somnambulism, posthypnotic phenomena do not usually occur. As soon, however, as complete amnesia can be brought about, then commands made to the subject during the hypnotic state to be carried out afterwards will usually be efficacious, even commands involving what the subject cannot carry out voluntarily, such as becoming paralyzed, or blind, or even going into a new hypnotic state. For example, as soon as the beginning subject can be rendered amnesic for the hypnotic period, the operator may say to him in hypnosis that, after he comes out of hypnosis, with amnesia for all that has been said in the hypnotic state, he will get out of his chair and raise the window when the operator drops a book on the floor, as if accidentally; and also that when the operator picks up the book from the floor, a few minutes later, the subject will instantly go back into a new hypnotic trance. Both events will typically occur just as described. The onset of the new hypnotic state is explainable only in terms of the command given in previous hypnosis, the amnesia for the previous hypnotic state, and a continuing dissociated (subconscious) mechanism which brings about the posthypnotic event. Posthypnotic amnesia is an amnesia of recall and of recognition without loss of retention; and the retained experience (in neural terms), capable of becoming an active process as well as a mere resting state of the nervous system without arousing in the subject's memory (recall and recognition) any awareness of its pres-

ence, is one good example of what is meant by dissociation.

Here is a specific illustration. One of my students, Miss Ba, developed a subject, Miss Da, to the somnambulistic stage. After complete somnambulism had been achieved, Miss Ba said to Miss Da in the hypnotic state that thereafter whenever she, Miss Ba, touched Miss Da on the forehead she would at once go again into a deep hypnotic trance. This worked on several occasions. Even at times when Miss Da was unwilling and protested, "I don't want to be hypnotized," a mere touch by Miss Ba's finger on her forehead was sufficient to make her slump down in a chair or on the floor, physically helpless and in a deep hypnotic state. Now if Miss Ba had put on a show, had pretended that she was going to demonstrate how hypnotizing is done, had called for volunteers from the audience, had pretended that she had never worked on any of them before while as a matter of fact Miss Da was one of the "volunteers," and then had put Miss Da into deep hypnosis by the mere touch of her finger, she would have been doing what many stage performers do.

The posthypnotic method of rehypnotizing a subject instantly on presentation of some stimulus designated in previous hypnosis has been known and used by hypnotists since the 1880's, if not earlier. Moll described the method as follows, in a book first published in 1889:

I say to a subject, "Directly I say the word 'to-day' you will fall into a fresh hypnosis." I then wake him, and he remains awake until I say "to-day"; upon which he is instantly thrown into a fresh hypnosis. (8, p. 174)

Moll reports instant rehypnosis by this posthypnotic method as much as a year after the last previous hypnosis, by Liégeois and Liébeault (8, p. 174). In

another article (15) I have reported the same phenomenon—instant, or nearly instant, rehypnosis at the count of seven, of a subject who had not been hypnotized for a year, a subject, furthermore, whom I had not myself developed to somnambulism or ever hypnotized individually before. Also my Subjects 1, 2, and 3 in another experiment (12) were rehypnotized quickly at the count of seven exactly a year (Subject 1) or a year lacking one day (Subjects 2 and 3) after their last previous hypnosis. In another series of experiments (13) involving 16 somnambulistic subjects, the largest number that I have ever had available at one time, subject Lu was rehypnotized in a few seconds approximately a year after he had last been hypnotized. If ever I have the opportunity, I should like to try hypnotizing my subjects of twenty and more years ago. My expectation is that they could be rehypnotized in a few seconds, according to the general rule that "once an hypnotic subject, always an hypnotic subject," supplemented by the additional rule that all the work is required in the first hypnotizing, not in rehypnotizing.

Though the posthypnotic method of quick rehypnotizing has long been known and used by hypnotists, the general public seems not to know about it. Hence it is easy for stage hypnotists to deceive the public.

#### SOME ILLUSTRATIVE CASES

To illustrate how stage hypnotists and others employ the principle of deception defined above, I shall describe briefly demonstrations by J. Robert Pauline on the stage, by Howard Klein over the radio, by Professor Peter J. Hampton in the classroom, and by Ralph Slater on the stage.

J. Robert Pauline, who died a few years ago, was for many years a highly

paid entertainer on the vaudeville stage. I first heard of him the summer of 1922. Dr. Harry R. DeSilva taught at McGill University during the year 1921-22. Pauline came that year to a Montreal theater and DeSilva induced him to demonstrate before his class in abnormal psychology. Pauline brought along one subject, and demonstrated quick rehypnosis and extreme hypnotic phenomena, including what appeared like the stopping of the flow of blood in one arm. This one stunt was probably faked, though DeSilva and the medical students in his class could not detect any trickery. Before DeSilva's class there was no attempt on Pauline's part to pretend that he could do quick hypnotizing of new subjects. He frankly told the class that the subject whom he brought with him had been hypnotized previously hundreds of times, and he could not be prevailed upon to attempt hypnosis on any members of the class.

DeSilva told me all this in the summer of 1922. On Thanksgiving Day the following November, I read in a newspaper that Pauline was exhibiting at a Chicago theater, and I went that evening to see him. His performance was as follows: Ten chairs were placed in a row on the stage. Pauline called for "volunteers" from the audience. As soon as the chairs were filled, he pretended to select the more hypnotizable subjects by trying to get contractures of the eyelids of each subject in turn. Then he asked one of these subjects, a young man of slight stature, to stand up. He pretended never to have seen him before, asked his weight and—as I recall—his name, joked about his slight build, and said that he would make a Samson out of him. Pauline spoke the one word "rigid," whereupon the subject became cataleptic, as stiff as a poker. Pauline, who was a heavy, muscular man, tossed the subject around like a

stick of wood, and placed him on two tables, his feet on one table and his head and shoulders on the other. Then he threw a blanket over him and invited several of the men on the stage to stand on him, and Pauline himself stood among the rest on the subject's rigid body. There was, of course, nothing significant in the word "rigid," any more than in Miss Ba's touch on Miss Da's forehead, as having in itself hypnotic power, aside from the fact that this was the signal specified in previous hypnosis. Any other word, such as "boo" or "woof" or "limp," would have served as well if previously specified in hypnosis. Though the rehypnosis seemed genuine, so many persons stood on the rigid body that I was confident that by some Houdini-like trick a plank had been slipped under the subject; otherwise serious physical harm might have been inflicted from so great a load.

Then Pauline asked another subject to stand up, and asked him a few questions as if to get better acquainted with a total stranger, just as in the case of the first subject. This was apparently the subject on whom in Montreal he had done, or had pretended to do, the stunt of stopping the flow of blood in an arm, for this stunt was done in a few seconds just as DeSilva had described it to me. The whole hypnotic show lasted no more than 15 or 20 minutes, being one show among many in a continuous performance lasting from 10 A.M. to the end of the evening each day.

Two days later I went again, in the forenoon, to see Pauline's performance. Everything was the same as the first time. When the call for "volunteers" from the audience was made, I recognized the two subjects described above, and also four or five others. Apparently a few of the subjects were actual volunteers who came forward for the

first time; but nothing was done with these except the eyelid contracture stunt, which did not work very well on the actual new volunteers. Pauline went through exactly the same rigmarole with the slight man for the demonstration of catalepsy, and with the other man for the exhibition of what looked like the stopping of the blood flow in an arm, pretending that he had never seen either of them before.

The activities of the entertainer Howard Klein have apparently been ignored completely so far as reference to him in the psychological journals is concerned. Perhaps this is best. But when a newsmagazine which is usually critical gives such uncritical publicity as *Time* gave to Klein in 1941 (9), there is need for psychologists to publish the truth of the matter. *Time* described a performance by Klein as follows:

Last week *Hobby Lobby*, in its first show of the season, gave Hypnotist Klein a chance—not at radio listeners but at 14 volunteers from the studio audience. Speaking through a microphone to the 14 seated out of sight in a soundproof room, he put twelve to sleep at the count of 30. After this exhibition, he further demonstrated hypnosis by a command to the twelve to join hands, enter the studio and there do as follows:

Handed a lemon with the information that it was a peach, one subject bit in juicily and chewed with never a tremor.

Another, told that his hand was numb, allowed his palm to be fingered by a match flame.

Made rigid and stretched between two chairs, a particularly durable subject gave not an inch when Hypnotist Klein climbed on his stomach. (9, p. 55)

It was clear from the account and the photographs in *Time*, and also in *Life* (7, p. 78), that genuine hypnotic phenomena had been produced, but not in the way in which radio listeners and readers of *Time* and *Life* would be led to believe. Experienced hypnotists would know better, and would recognize Klein's cases in which ex-

treme hypnotic phenomena occurred so quickly as predeveloped subjects, especially in view of Klein's known performance on new subjects on another occasion. The journalist Jerome Beatty went to see Klein perform on a group of 500 soldiers at Fort Dix, New Jersey, in February, 1942. In a letter to me dated February 19, 1942, Mr. Beatty wrote the following: "Klein tried the hand-clasping thing on the audience of about 500. About 20 said they couldn't get their hands apart."

If Klein's performance over the radio had been actually as pretended, then we would expect that six-sevenths (12 out of 14) of the 500 soldiers, or 429, would have been put into deep hypnosis, or perhaps an even greater number, since at Fort Dix Klein had a better chance. There the subjects could see as well as hear him, and Klein was not limited to a few seconds or to counting. But, as Mr. Beatty's letter states, in the group hypnosis at Fort Dix not a single subject was put into deep hypnosis. The hand-clasping stunt is a very elementary hypnotic phenomenon, which can usually be obtained, at least in my own experience in group hypnosis of college classes, with about 25 per cent of subjects. This is a common and useful method of selecting the more highly hypnotizable subjects on whom to try to get later, by individual methods, phenomena of really deep hypnosis. Mr. Beatty's letter to me states that Klein "asked for volunteers from that group [of 20 on whom the hand-clasping stunt had worked, out of the 500]. Three came up and he used one of them. He did the usual show stuff."

If 12 of the 14 subjects in Klein's radio performance were predeveloped, there was nothing more remarkable in their going into deep hypnosis at the count of 30 than in the case of Miss Da's going into deep hypnosis when touched

on the forehead by Miss Ba. I am surprised that the subjects had not been prepared in previous hypnosis to go into deep hypnosis at the count of three or seven, to save time and to make the hypnotist's "powers" seem greater, or at some mystic-sounding word like "mumbo-jumbo," or merely at the sound of the closing of the door of the soundproof room.

Hampton's demonstration of hypnosis (4) in one respect belongs with legitimate uses of hypnosis for instructional purposes. With this use of hypnosis I have no quarrel, but quite the contrary. My first two articles on hypnotism, published more than twenty years ago (10, 11), both urged instructional uses of hypnotic demonstrations. Presumably the members of Hampton's class were not deceived as to the previous hypnotic history of the subjects. But in another respect the demonstration *as reported* in the article belongs squarely with Pauline's stage performances and with Klein's radio performance. The article claims "to show the reader just how the induction of the hypnotic trance is accomplished" (4, p. 249). No mention is made of the fact that the seven subjects had been previously selected and developed to the somnambulistic stage. The only way to show "how the actual induction of hypnotism is carried on" (4, p. 249) is to demonstrate the actual work of selecting and developing somnambulism for the first time, and this Hampton does not do in the least. In a letter to Hampton on July 25, 1945, I wrote the following:

I have read with interest your article, A Demonstration of Hypnotism. . . . I would like to ask a few questions regarding it.

First, how were the seven subjects originally selected for high hypnotizability, i.e., by group hypnosis on a large group or by work on individual subjects at the start?

Second, how much time, how many hours

and how many sessions, if more than one, was spent in developing each of the subjects? Or what was the average time, the longest time, and the shortest time, required to develop each of the subjects to the somnambulistic stage?

Third, with previously developed subjects such as these, why were they not rehypnotized instantly, or in a few seconds, for the purposes of the demonstration of extreme hypnotic phenomena during a class hour?

I think it is unfortunate that you did not anticipate such questions as these, and that you did not give information regarding the previous hypnotic histories of the seven subjects. In the absence of such information, many readers of *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, being unfamiliar, as you say, with the methods of inducing hypnosis, might make the mistake of supposing that these subjects were being hypnotized for the first time.

I received a reply from Hampton, dated August 23, 1945, as follows:

Your remarks about my article on A Demonstration of Hypnotism are well taken. I agree with you that some indication should have been made about the preliminary setting for the hypnotic demonstration. The subjects were put into the hypnotic state three times before the actual demonstration. The sessions lasted about 30 minutes each.

I regret that Hampton ignored my first and third questions. The first question is really the most important one of all, in view of the difficulty of selecting suitable subjects and developing them enough for such a demonstration as the one which Hampton describes. Even my second question was answered incompletely and casually. I should be interested to know how much time was spent in selecting these seven subjects, and from how large a group they were selected; also, how much time if any was spent in trying unsuccessfully to develop other subjects. The work of selecting and developing subjects, the description of which Hampton omits in his article, and which he largely ignores in his letter (through failure to answer

my first question), is not only slow and difficult, but also instructive. After this preliminary work is done, rehypnotizing is quick and easy, and not at all instructive as to the real art of hypnotizing.

As a demonstration of rehypnotizing, Hampton's performance is unnecessarily complicated and largely irrelevant. If an operator fails to try to get rehypnosis by means of some specifically designated posthypnotic signal, but, in rehypnotizing, starts out repeating parts of his original technique, all of the original significance of this technique is lost, and extreme results should come quickly, in five seconds rather than in five minutes. The general rule is that one may begin each new hypnotic session with a subject at the point where one left off at the previous session, without any necessity of repeating the work originally required to induce hypnosis.

For all that Hampton says to the contrary in his article, and from all that he does say, the reader inexperienced in hypnosis would infer that Hampton claims to be able to get such results as he reports with 100 per cent of subjects—hypnotizing for the first time a batch of seven, selected at random, to the somnambulistic stage in five minutes, the time required in this demonstration as stated by Hampton ("four minutes of this," and then "for a full minute"). It is this deceptive aspect of the article which I object to, and which has led me to classify it with deceptive stage and radio exhibitions.

In another article (5), published several months later than the one to which I have devoted my criticism, Hampton has again repeated the same deception, of failing to state that the subjects used in the demonstration had been previously selected and developed.

After writing this article with only Pauline, Klein, and Hampton men-

tioned, I received pertinent information regarding another much publicized hypnotist, Ralph Slater (not to be confused with Andrew Salter). *Life* stated in November, 1941 (7, p. 90) that "Slater . . . can put a subject under in 8 sec. flat," leaving the reader to suppose that this can be done with subjects who have not been predeveloped. Mr. Loyd E. Hunt, a research engineer in New York, has favored me with some comments on Slater, in a letter dated October 21, 1945. Mr. Hunt has written as follows:

Mrs. Hunt and I attended a performance given by Mr. Slater at Carnegie Hall last summer. . . . At this performance, Mr. Slater was preceded on the stage by Mr. Stan Shaw, a radio announcer, who gave an account of Slater's ability. The announcer stated that Slater was the world's fastest hypnotist, . . . and I understood him to say that Mr. Slater could put anyone to sleep in a few seconds. Slater appeared and called for volunteers from the audience.

Mr. Hunt writes that Slater used various tests, including the above-mentioned handclasping test, by means of which he eliminated some of the twelve. Then he proceeded to work on the remaining subjects. "He spoke his name five times, but interspersed some sleep chatter between, so that the induction consumed about five minutes."

Among the subjects were two sailors. In the first of these sailors, according to Mr. Hunt's letter, Slater produced analgesia of a hand, as tested by jabs with a hypodermic needle made by a physician called from the audience, and also other hypnotic phenomena. The second sailor was made cataleptic. According to Mr. Hunt's letter, "The sailor was laid across two chairs and Slater stood on his chest." Posthypnotic paralysis of an arm also was produced in the second sailor.

Were these two sailors being put

under hypnosis for the first time, as the audience had apparently been led to think? Mr. Hunt's letter answers this question as follows:

After the performance I talked with the first sailor and he readily admitted that he was a trained subject, having submitted to many experiments while he was in college. It was my impression that the second sailor bore a marked similarity to one that appeared in an article about Slater published in *Life* magazine several years ago.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This article has been devoted to a criticism of exhibitions of hypnosis which deceive audiences by a failure to distinguish between the first hypnotizing of somnambulistic subjects, almost always a slow and difficult process possible with only a small percentage of persons, and the rehypnotizing of these same subjects, which can be done easily and quickly. Performers deceive the public when they conceal the fact that subjects whom they appear to hypnotize quickly for the first time are really being only rehypnotized. After subjects have been selected for high hypnotizability, and then have been hypnotized deeply, methods used in later rehypnotizing are irrelevant in regard to showing how hypnotizing occurs in the first place.

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